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WEB-BASED AUDIO: RESOURCES FOR TEACHING GERMAN

INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a critical element of foreign language proficiency, making up the largest portion of our use of language. The average person spends considerably more time listening than reading, speaking or writing. Increasingly, research has paid more attention to the importance of systematic listening training in the language learning process. Students need comprehensible input, not only in the form of reading but also listening materials. The values of using authentic materials and their uses in instruction have also been explored.

Radio, which is celebrating its 75th birthday in Germany, still is an important source of information and entertainment in most countries. This holds particularly true for Germany. Using authentic radio broadcasts in German instruction has been subject to limitations in the past, since in North America, it could only be received via short-wave. Radios produced for the US market generally do not have short wave capability and few Americans own a short wave radio. The poor audio quality of short wave broadcasts restricts their use for most language learners, who struggle with authentic discourse. They need to hear broadcasts in clear, FM quality. Furthermore, the use of the medium short-wave limits the listener to a few German-speaking stations, chief among them *Deutsche Welle* (Campana; Lutcavage; Wipf).

A new technology has become available which provides easy access to a wider variety of radio broadcasts in excellent audio quality. Internet-delivered audio (and video) is rapidly becoming more wide-spread. Instructors and students already use the World-Wide-Web extensively, both at school and at home to read texts files on the Web and to download graphics. Accessing audio, including radio broadcasts from abroad, is a relatively easy next step of World Wide Web use.

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Web-based audio therefore opens new possibilities. Increasingly, students have their own computers, and direct access to the Internet. This makes it possible to listen to authentic German radio in the convenience of one's room without having to go to a lab.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY

Audio content is delivered through a process called "streaming." No large files are saved to a user's hard drive; instead, small portions of digital media material are sent to the user in small data packets. What is needed to use this technology? For users who do not have access to an ISDN line and are dialing up from home, a modem with a speed of 28.8 K baud or higher is required. One needs to download streaming audio and video software such as RealPlayer, produced by the Real Networks company. RealPlayer 5.0 can be downloaded in minutes free of charge <<http://www.real.com>>. In addition, the computer may also prompt the user to download a so-called "plug-in." Both Netscape Navigator and Microsoft's Internet Explorer provide the necessary plug-ins (see also Goodwin-Jones; Heller).

SOURCES OF GERMAN-SPEAKING RADIO ON THE WEB

German-speaking radio provides news and information in addition to music to a greater extent than radio in the US. For the most part, radio in Germany is part of the public broadcasting system. Organized by the various *Länder*, the *Rundfunkanstalten* (one hesitates to use the word "radio station," which conjures up a different image in the American context) are required to inform the public in a variety of ways. Since the early 1980's another organizational form of broadcasting has emerged in the media scene of Germany and Switzerland: joint efforts between public broadcasting systems and private broadcasting stations.

The regional *Rundfunkanstalten* broadcast between two and five channels (*Programme*) which usually are numbered. All of them offer news, weather and regional traffic reports, usually on the hour, often also on the half hour. In addition, they broadcast music, with the programming on these channels varying greatly. In the case of the *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, for example, the programming is as follows: *Bayern 1* focuses on general news reporting; *Bayern 2* on cultural, scientific and church topics; *Bayern 3* on traffic reports and pop music; *Bayern 4* offers classical music and *B 5 aktuell* (*Bayern 5*) offers a variety of political, eco-

nostic, cultural, and sports news every 15 minutes as well as frequent traffic reports. Only some of these channels can be received through the World-Wide-Web using RealAudio. In the case of the *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, it is *Bayern 3* and *B 5 aktuell*. Similarly, some of the other broadcasting organizations offer some of their channels through the Internet. For a listing of German-speaking channels available via the Web, see the appendix.

One of the best starting points for anyone exploring web-based radio is *Deutsche Welle* (<<http://www.dwelle.de>>). Luckily, the organization has fully embraced the World-Wide-Web in recent years and offers instructors and students a multitude of resources. The entire German programming is available on the Web around the clock. News summaries are given every 30 minutes. The bulk of the programming covers reports on a wide variety of topics. Counting the *Kurznachrichten*, *Deutsche Welle* broadcasts approximately 100 programs (*Sendungen*) daily, some of which are repeated later in the day. These include *Funkjournal*, *Szene*, *Presseschau*, *Kulturreport*, *Sport kompakt*, *Klassik und mehr*, *WISO* (*Wirtschaft und Soziales*) and *Politik und Zeitgeschehen*. A major advantage of *Deutsche Welle* is the extensive amount of text support provided on its Web site. Each of the above-mentioned programs maintains its own Web page and some of them provide excerpts of the text version (transcription) of a particular broadcast as well as background information. In the *WISO* Web page, for example, the stock market report is given daily, as well as the text of the lead story.

USING WEB-DELIVERED RADIO AND SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Original radio broadcasts provide opportunities and challenges. First and foremost, they are an excellent resource for foreign language instructors, both native and non-native, who have a need to maintain their language skills. They provide an easy way of accessing up-to-date information on recent cultural, economic and political developments in the countries where the language is spoken. Radio via the Internet provides this opportunity. *Deutsche Welle* offers a tremendous breadth of programming, covering a wide range of areas.

Instructors can also record selected portions of the broadcasts and use them as sources of listening comprehension activities in the classroom. Also, the wide-spread availability of this medium makes it an increasingly important source for out-of-class listening by students. Even though

unedited, authentic discourse such as radio broadcasts requires a considerable degree of proficiency for comprehension, learners at the lower levels can derive important benefits from listening to radio broadcasts, as long as they have been prepared to listen actively for certain items and have been given key vocabulary. By listening to authentic radio broadcasts, learners are exposed to a variety of speakers and accents. Comprehension of news items relating to the US or world events may be facilitated by prior knowledge. In addition, listeners can learn about events which are not covered by US news media.

Sample Activity 1:

Traffic Report (Introductory Level)

Congestion on Germany's *Autobahnen* has become a fact of life, particularly since the early 1990's. Therefore, traffic reports on the radio are an important and frequent service for listeners. This activity integrates listening comprehension and geography. Students familiarize themselves with geographic locations and place names which often are missing in other instructional materials. In the preparation phase of this activity, learners are given a highway map of the particular region of Germany and are provided with key vocabulary, such as *Stau*, *Richtung*, *Kreuz*, *Dreieck*. For the comprehension check, the instructor creates a simple chart with the following categories: *Autobahn Nr.*, *Autobahn segment*, length of traffic jam. Students then listen to the recorded broadcast repeatedly, look up the affected interstates on the map and fill in as much information on the chart as possible. Here is the transcript of a traffic report on SWR 3 (*Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk*):

SWR 3 Verkehrsservice:

Autobahn 5 Kassel Richtung Frankfurt zwischen Obermörlen und Friedberg stockender Verkehr.

A 5 Basel Richtung Karlsruhe zwischen Hartheim-Heitersheim und Bad Krotzingen 2 Kilometer und zwischen Offenburg und Appenweiler 2 Kilometer.

Autobahn 6 Mannheim - Saarbrücken zwischen Kaiserslautern-Ost und -West in beiden Richtungen 3 Kilometer.

Autobahn 61 Ludwigshafen Richtung Koblenz zwischen Bingen und Rheinböhlen 4 Kilometer.

Autobahn 8 Stuttgart Richtung Karlsruhe zwischen Kreuz Stuttgart und Dreieck Leonberg 7 Kilometer.

Autobahn 81 Heilbronn Richtung Stuttgart zwischen Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen und Dreieck Leonberg 10 Kilometer.

Sample Activity 2:

Weather Report (Introductory/Intermediate Level)

Weather reports can be used at a variety of language-ability levels, including the beginning level, and are another authentic source of information on geography and climate. The focus can be placed on listening for numbers, weather conditions or place names. An interesting example is provided by the extended, European weather reports on *Deutsche Welle*. Students are given a map of Europe, then asked to identify the places and make a note of temperatures and weather conditions.

Das Wetter in Europa:

Skandinavien: Leicht bewölkt. Höchsttemperaturen 8 - 12 Grad.

Nordfrankreich, Benelux: Regen, Höchsttemperaturen 11 - 15 Grad.

Südfrankreich: Sehr wechselhaft, Höchsttemperaturen 15 - 20 Grad.

The report continues with other regions of Europe. Finally, conditions are summarized for selected locations:

Frankfurt bedeckt bei - 2 Grad

Hamburg Nebel 0 Grad

The report continues with major European locations such as *Mallorca, Rom, Athen, and Moskau*.

Sample Activity 3:

Stock Market Report (Various Levels)

As a beginning level activity (listening for numbers), students are given a list of the 30 DAX companies, the German equivalent of the Dow-Jones Industrial average. Then they listen to the *Börsenbericht* on *Deutsche Welle* and make a note of the closing values and changes. As an advanced-level activity, students answer a series of comprehension questions about the day's stock market news summary. A follow-up activity

consists of having the entire text printed out from the *Deutsche Welle* WWW page and used for reading comprehension.

Sample Activity 4:

Business News Report (Advanced Level)

For an upper-level undergraduate course in business German, the *Deutsche Welle* broadcast *WISO: Das Wirtschaftsmagazin* provides an excellent source of listening practice. With adequate preparation in key vocabulary and content, students can use many of the segments of this program. Particularly useful are international business news items. A portion of the news in this program is generally devoted to international markets (particularly the US market) and is reported on the same day in the US. Learners can prepare themselves for the global business news in *WISO* by following the American business media on the same day. Here is an example:

On December 1, 1998, the merger between Exxon and Mobil Oil was the major international business news item, covered extensively by most US news media. By tuning in to National Public Radio's program "Marketplace," by viewing PBS's "Nightly Business Report" or PBS's "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer" in the early evening hours, one could obtain detailed information about the largest corporate merger in US history. Various panels of experts discussed the historical background of this event as well as its ramifications for the future.

"Armed" with this background knowledge, students could tune in to *Deutsche Welle's WISO* program a few hours later. It was the lead story and was covered extensively. Since students were informed about the event in English, important vocabulary in the German reporting, such as *Mega-Fusion*, *Stellenabbau*, *Kartellbehörden* and *Reaktion auf BP-Amoco Fusion* became more accessible.

CONCLUSION

The exponential growth of Internet use and the availability of streamed audio technology make authentic foreign language radio broadcasts available to a wide audience. Currently, approximately ten stations are available via the Web, and the number is bound to increase. Internet-based radio, combined with the textual support provided on many of the broadcasting systems' Web sites, is a valuable resource for listening comprehension training and cultural information.

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APPENDIX

SELECTED LISTING OF GERMAN-SPEAKING RADIO

Channels marked with an * can be listened to on the WWW with RealPlayer and provide program guides and background information. WWW sites listed without an * provide program guides and other information (as of January 1999).

Germany

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| *Deutsche Welle | < http://www.dwelle.de > |
| Bayrischer Rundfunk | < http://www.br-online.de > |
| *Bayern 3 live | |
| *B 5 aktuell live | |
| Hessischer Rundfunk | < http://www.hr-online.de > |
| *hr 3 | |
| Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk | < http://www.mdr.de > |
| *MDR LIFE | |
| Norddeutscher Rundfunk | < http://www.ndr.de > |
| *NDR 4 Info | |
| *Hamburg Welle | |
| Radio Bremen | < http://www.radiobremen.de > |
| *Bremen 4 | |
| Saarländischer Rundfunk | < http://www.sr-online.de > |
| Sender Freies Berlin | < http://www.sfb-berlin.de > |
| Südwestrundfunk | < http://www.swr-online.de > |
| *SWR 3 | |
| Westdeutscher Rundfunk | < http://www.wdr.de > |

Austria

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Österreichischer Rundfunk ORF | < http://www.orf.at > |
|-------------------------------|---|

Switzerland

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Schweizer Radio | < http://www.drs.ch > |
| *Radio Argovia | < http://www.argovia.ch > |